

# Hills church offers home to homeless

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(South Oakland Shelter) helping me out. But if I can make it without it, I'd rather," the 41-year-old said.

The two were among the 27-30 homeless who spent evenings at the southeast Farmington Hills church Dec. 25 to Jan. 1. The holiday week was St. Alexander's turn to house the homeless each evening and to provide dinner, breakfast and a bag lunch for the next day.

THE CHURCH is one of 39 participating in the Royal Oak-based SOS rotating emergency shelter program. Each church takes one week, September-May, to help the homeless.

"There's a story in every one of them," said Peggy Harris, St. Alexander homeless program coordinator. "The big problem is they do not have anywhere to go. They go to the YMCA in Royal Oak for showers. Others are doing some kind of job. And some are left on the corner, or they go to the malls or the library, where it's warm."

Cots, with clean and warm bedding, are provided for St. Alexander's homeless in the church social hall. Men are separated from the women and the few children. Men are prepared in advance to ensure nutritious meals, all of which are provided by volunteers and with donations.

**'Motels cost too much money. And rooming houses, they're too dirty and they have cockroaches. I can't live like that.'**

— homeless man

Barbara Treacher and husband John run the St. Alexander homeless kitchen. Like the other 70 volunteers at St. Alexander, the couple recall some of the homeless who touched their hearts.

They well remember the young couple with a baby who lived in a car. When the man got a job, the volunteers thought the couple's life would improve. But drugs re-entered the scene. And there was the well-dressed, educated young man who surprised them all when he walked into St. Alexander for a hot meal.

"They don't have any direction, they really don't," St. Alexander volunteer Nora Burns said.

The homeless at St. Alexander are among the estimated 10,000 homeless in affluent Oakland County. Last year, SOS served 244 people. This year, about 200 have walked through the center's Royal Oak storefront headquarters. Half of last year's participants were 20-40 years old. Few are teenagers.

MANY ARE unemployed and under employed. Many have jobs but



TOM ARNETT/staff photographer

By day, the homeless wander the streets or visit the state social services office, the library or the mall. At night, they sleep on

cots at churches such as St. Alexander's, a member of the South Oakland Shelter homeless program.

can't afford the ever-increasing rents even in the less-expensive apartments. And many have personal and emotional problems strangling their lives.

"Our goal is to make it unable to allow people to live that kind of lifestyle," Royal Oak SOS director Lillian Schneble said. "We have had success stories that have taken maybe three years. Something just snaps and they come back to the world. Every story is different. Every reason is different. Maybe the plant closes . . . My husband coined the phrase: 'There but for three house payments go I.'"

The 41-year-old man at St. Alexander works odd jobs during the

summer but when the cold weather sets in, "everything closes down." One day, he plans to get back up on his feet. Until then, he's grateful for SOS.

"Motels cost too much money. And rooming houses, they're too dirty and they have cockroaches. I can't live like that."

Harris at St. Alexander quickly casts aside the notion that the homeless are aimless burns. "They can dispel the myth. I don't why people are in this situation. Some are disabled; some are just people with problems."

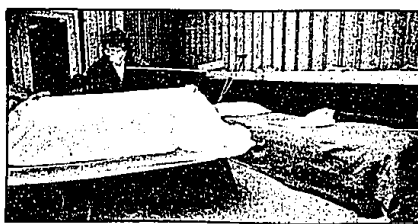
SOS ATTEMPTS to provide the homeless with a place to sleep, hot food and some direction for getting their lives back together. But SOS is not a place to hide.

Each SOS participant is required to begin at the Royal Oak center on Main Street where each is screened and counseled. Alcoholics and other drug abusers are not welcome.

A counselor is on hand 20 hours a week. "We work on a little bit on self-esteem and how you get yourself out of here," Schneble said.

"How do you get a job if you don't have an address or a telephone or a place to be contacted?" Schneble asked. "There's a lot of people out there who don't choose to live like this. Self-esteem is one of the biggest problems."

From the Royal Oak center, the participating homeless are bused to the particular church offering help on a particular week. A couple of men arrived at St. Alexander in their own cars.



TOM ARNETT/staff photographer

St. Alexander's volunteer Esther Terminielli makes up the cots, with clean sheets and blankets for the homeless who arrived at the church by bus from the Royal Oak-based South Oakland Shelter for the homeless. Use of the bus was donated by Farmington Hills Mercy High School.

But the majority are without anything except the clothes on their back. One elderly woman works as a cleaning lady for a Bloomfield Hills family. Another woman, abused by her husband, was waiting to regain possession of her home.

BY FAR, the homeless are men. It's the age-old lifeboat theory: women and children first.

"When crisis hits, people are more prone to dealing with women. The women can move in with relatives. And women can get better aid from social services, especially if they have kids. For men, it's really tough. Just within the last year have single men been able to get anything (from social services)," Schneble said.

So far, Schneble says there is no maximum time a person can participate in the SOS program. But sooner or later, a restriction will have to be set simply because the program is expensive and depends for the most part on donations.

The ideal solution would be a permanent shelter for south Oakland County's homeless. But it has been a continuing battle financially and with zoning officials and residents who don't want a shelter near their homes.

"We need a permanent place for these people where they can be counseled and get back on their feet. If we could just find a building where these people could go," Harris said.

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## Botsford doctors deliver area's first baby in '89

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"He's going to be easy to care for," the baby's father said. "He's slept through a lot of feedings and I've hardly heard him cry at all."

Frank and Terry Vianueva have the caring-for mapped out. Both employed at Michigan National Bank Computer Center in Livonia, he works the day shift, she works the afternoon shift and they intend to keep it that way when she goes back to work in another six to eight weeks.

Brian Todd is the eighth grandchild for his father's parents and the 10th grandchild for his mother's parents.

"Five of those cousins have birth-

days in December. I guess my son waited so long to be born so he would be different," Terry Vianueva said.

THE BABY was expected Dec. 23. Of her 16-hour wait during induced labor, Terry Vianueva said she had "a lot of praise to give, and a great deal of appreciation for, a doctors and staff" who were with her.

"They brought flowers from another part of the hospital to brighten up my room, gave me a basket of fruit and were with me every minute of the time. I had no discomfort at all," she said.

Frank Vianueva was born and raised in Detroit. Terry Vianueva grew up in Garden City and has relatives there.

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